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EURO-ASIAN TRANSPORT LINKS

Information on constitution of the Task Force on Euro-Asian transport links

Note by the secretariat

During its sixty-fifth session (February 2003), the UNECE Inland Transport Committee supported "*the idea about the establishment of a UNECE-ESCAP task force which would be mandated to coordinate activities and efforts of the concerned countries and international organizations involved in the development of Euro-Asian land transport links*" (ECE/TRANS/152, para. 32). At the session, participants genuinely felt that such a task force could play an important role in streamlining the sometimes not closely coordinated efforts by the international community and concerned States thus ensuring the most effective and more dynamic development of Euro-Asian (E-A) land transport links.

In addition, in the view of the UN International Ministerial Meeting on Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation which took place in August 2003 in Kazakhstan, the establishment of such a task force appeared to be an appropriate way of activating a viable mechanism for the international community to ensure, in a coordinated and systematic way, the follow-up to the expected outcome of the Ministerial Meeting in all areas that relate to the development of E-A land transport links.

The idea about setting up such a task force, with the participation of UNECE, UNESCAP and, possibly, the European Commission, was the direct outcome of the Joint UNECE-ESCAP Strategic Vision document on the development of the Euro-Asian transport links (TRANS/WP.5/2001/14), which was adopted both by the Inland Transport Committee in 2002 and the UNECE Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics in 2001 (ECE/TRANS/139, para.31 and TRANS/WP.5/30, para.31).

An additional reason for proposing such a task force was the fact that, since the Second St. Petersburg International Euro-Asian transport conference in 2000, there appeared to be a certain increase in the proliferation of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral initiatives and programmes related to the development of E-A transport links. International organizations and international financial institutions, together with some countries in the region, have not spared efforts and resources to launch initiatives aimed at further promoting the importance of E-A links in order to reap the benefits of an improved international division of labour between the countries of both continents.

Aware of these developments, the above-mentioned organizations were invited to consider the establishment of a joint task force (TF) as envisaged in the Common UNECE-ESCAP Strategic vision document (TRANS/WP.5/2001/14) point 8. 1, with objectives and tasks aimed primarily at ensuring a more complete coordination and monitoring of all international, regional and national initiatives and programmes for the development of E-A transport links.

The following membership of the Task Force was proposed:

- UNECE, UNESCAP (and possibly EC) representatives;
- national focal points nominated by concerned States;
- competent international organizations and international financial institutions (IFIs);
- related programmes (TRACECA, SPECA).

The possible objectives of the Task Force, would include those outlined in the Common Vision document, e.g.

- (i) a coherent, consistent and systematic monitoring of all initiatives and programmes along all Euro-Asian transport corridors in a coordinated manner, thus ensuring that international and national resources targeting the development of corridors are utilized in the most efficient manner;
- (ii) the coordinating function of the Task Force would also ensure that overlap or duplication of some initiatives or activities on an international or regional level are avoided and that international involvement and assistance is provided in a concerted and focused manner.

In terms of the organization of work, the following elements were proposed:

- the setting up of focal points by each concerned State;

- the establishment of working groups for each Euro-Asian corridor to determine and develop modal routes and networks; the working group may include representatives of concerned States, EU, UNECE, UNESCAP, IRU, IRF, OSZhD, UIC, IFIs; the working group's terms of reference should include the establishment of modal routes and networks, the development of a joint policy for each Corridor and relevant major routes, monitoring and implementation of the policy, monitoring of the development of main competitive routes and the development of joint projects, etc.
- the establishment and maintenance of the information base which may include: all completed, ongoing and planned initiatives, activities and projects (national, regional and international) related to the development of E-A transport links, financing schemes for road and rail infrastructure, research projects and studies with a focus on E-A links, etc.
- the convening of annual sessions of the Task Force, reporting by all participating members of the Task Force on relevant developments and planned activities.

At about the same time when the proposal for the establishment of a Task Force was being launched, UNECE and UNESCAP initiated jointly the implementation of a project on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages. This project is one component of the project funded by the UN Development Account entitled "Capacity-building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages" (2002-2006). The UNECE and UNESCAP component was also designed to follow-up on the "Common UNECE/ESCAP Strategic Vision for Euro-Asian Transport Links". Countries invited to participate in the project included: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

However, the postponement of the establishment of the Task Force was based on the arguments that existing fora for coordination and information exchange (such as SPECA) could be strengthened, and that the networks with the concerned countries could be further developed (through the Interregional Development Account Project under which national counterparts are being identified and a database being developed. These steps were viewed as building blocks for an effective Task Force to be established in the future.

In the meantime, the first Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages under this project was organized jointly by UNECE and UNESCAP and held from 9-11 March 2004, in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The main focus of the meeting was the identification of the most appropriate Euro-Asian inland transport routes and the condition for their development. The main elements of a strategy for development of Euro-Asian Transport Links were agreed on, including focusing on major routes along the four main Euro-Asian Corridors that had been agreed upon at international level and which represent an extension of the Pan-European Transport Corridors. The activities to carry out this strategy, developed in 3 phases over 2004-2006, would consist of: identification of major routes of Euro-Asian importance; collection and processing of related infrastructure and traffic data; assessment of priority projects along these routes; removal of border crossing obstacles and hindrances; implementation of major

international transport agreements and conventions; and formulation and implementation of national action plans.

In view of the ongoing work and planned schedule of activities in the joint UNECE/UNESCAP project, **the establishment of the Task Force on Euro-Asian transport links**, before completion of the UNECE/UNESCAP project, **may strengthen the objective pursued in this project and, at the same time, ensure a coordination with other relevant activities in the Euro-Asian region.**
